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ABSTRACT

A study examined eight business Spanish textbooks for cultural content by looking at commonly appearing cultural topics and themes, presentation of cultural information, activities and techniques used to promote cultural understanding, and incorporation of authentic materials. The texts were evenly divided among beginning, intermediate, and advanced language proficiency levels. Clues to the books' cultural orientation were sought in the introductions and texts. It was found that business, linguistic, and cultural content varied in positive correlation with the text's difficulty level. Content in each area was determined from a sample unit in each book. Sources of cultural content were found to include short readings, cultural notes, photographs, advertisements, greeting cards, stamps, and maps. Most authentic materials contained little or no cultural information. In most texts, little emphasis was placed on patterns of daily living or economic culture, and fewer activities focused on cultural knowledge or understanding. Treatment of cultural topics appeared arbitrary and reflected lack of consensus about which aspects of culture should be taught in business Spanish. Recommendations for textbook improvement are made, based on the findings. The textbook evaluation form is included. Contains 15 references. (MSE)

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THE CULTURAL CONTENT OF BUSINESS SPANISH TEXTS

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The cultural content of business Spanish texts

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How much culture is taught in the business Spanish course? Which aspects of culture are treated, and with what methods? The need to incorporate cultural information and promote cross-cultural understanding is as great in business Spanish courses as in traditional Spanish classes. This study examines eight business Spanish texts to gain insight into the cultural content of the business Spanish curriculum. A number of researchers (Ramirez & Hall, 1990; Dechert & Kastner, 1989; Arizpe & Aguirre, 1987; Kramsch, 1987; Levno & Pfister, 1980) have chosen to approach the issue of cultural content from an analysis of textbooks to see what kinds of culture are taught, how much, and with what techniques. These studies assume that course content derives primarily from texts.

We considered the following questions: what cultural topics and themes commonly appear in the texts; how is the cultural information presented; what activities and techniques are used to promote cultural understanding; and to what extent do the texts incorporate authentic materials? The texts we examined included: Curry, Rojas, Sepúlveda, Petersen. Carreras: Negocios. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985; Gómez-Quintero & Pérez. Al día en los negocios: Hablemos. New York: Random House, 1984; Jarvis & Lebredo. Spanish for Business and Finance. Lexington, MA: D. C.

Heath, 1988; Jarvis & Lebredo. Spanish for Business and Economics. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1984; Lebredo & Fortuny-Amat. Spanish for Business and Economics. A Reader and Workbook. Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath, 1987; Sallese & Griffin. Español práctico para negocios. New York: Macmillan, 1988; Tcachuk. En el mundo de los negocios. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986; Valdivieso & Valdivieso. Negocios y comunicaciones. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1988. From each we collected information on the level of the text, cultural orientation, the balance of business, linguistic, and cultural content, sources of cultural content, cultural topics and activity types.

Level

The eight texts are fairly evenly divided among beginning, intermediate and advanced levels. Two (both by Jarvis & Lebredo) are geared for beginning level (first year) students; three are intended for intermediate (second year) language students (Curry etc.; Lebredo & Fortuny-Amat; Sallese & Griffin); one (Gómez-Quintero & Pérez) is for intermediate or advanced classes; and two are for the advanced (third year) student (Tcachuk; Valdivieso & Valdivieso).

Cultural Orientation

To determine whether the authors considered culture to be an important part of their text, we reviewed introductory materials (introduction, notes to the teacher/student, or preface) for references to culturally-related instructional goals or content. Half of the texts (Gómez-Quintero & Pérez; Jarvis & Lebredo; Jarvis & Lebredo; Lebredo & Fortuny-Amat) did not mention

culture in the introductory pages, while the others made some references to it.

The introduction to the instructor's edition of the Curry et al text suggests six culturally-oriented activities that the teacher might use as a supplement: student internships in local community institutions that interact with Hispanics, invitations to native speaker guest lecturers from the community, field trips, use of A-V materials in class, student-organized cultural sessions centered on Hispanic music, newspapers, arts and crafts, and informing students of Hispanic cultural events in the community or other institutions. Although these are excellent suggestions, none of the activities are mentioned again in the body of the text.

In introductory pages to the professor and students, Valdivieso & Valdivieso explain that one of their purposes is to inform students about cultural, psychological and sociological differences that might facilitate doing business with Spanish speakers. The section "notas de interés profesional" presents cultural and psychological insights into specific business situations, and includes information on laws and protocol that influence business transactions in Spain and Latin America. The "proyectos" section in each chapter suggests ideas for oral presentations or research projects that take students into the local community or the library. The text effectively carries out the culturally-related goals and integrates business culture with the language and business correspondence content of the text.

Tcachuk introduces students to a series of authentic

situations about an American businessman who travels to Argentina, using one central character, city and project to promote thematic unity. Within the context of each chapter's opening reading and dialog, she presents considerable information about patterns of everyday living and business culture. Each chapter also contains a cultural vignette entitled "Formas de pensar y vivir" and lively discussion questions.

Sallese & Griffin refer briefly in the preface to business terms and cultural notes on Spanish-speaking lands and people that are intended to broaden the students' understanding of business in those settings. However, the cultural notes in each chapter are written in English, implying that culture is something apart from language and that it is best taught in English.

Business, linguistic, and cultural content

The balance of business, linguistic and cultural content varies in relation to the level of the text. As expected, the advanced texts (Tcachuk; Valdivieso & Valdivieso) have the most business and cultural content, while the beginning texts place a much greater emphasis on language instruction with a minimal treatment of culture. (See Table 1). We have defined culture as patterns of everyday living and business/economic culture that pertain to a particular Hispanic group or country, as opposed to generic cultural or economic information that applies to any developed country. Generic culture was pervasive in most of the texts, for example appearing in readings about organizational structure of a firm, photographs of offices that could be from

any developed country, dialogs about booking a room in a hotel, renting an office, buying insurance, and business correspondence or adververtisements whose sole cultural indicator other than the language was the place name attached to them.

To determine the amount of content in each area, we examined a sample unit (chapter three) closely and counted the pages devoted to business, language, or culture. Then, we reviewed the entire text for cultural topics, source materials and activities. Understanding that the language, business and cultural content are sometimes integrated, we established the following guidelines to differentiate between predominantly business, language and cultural content. Business content was defined as dialogs or readings with a distinct business focus, documents, advertisements, and role plays and compositions that emphasized business content. We considered linguistic content to be vocabulary lists, grammar and vocabulary exercises, comprehension questions, and oral practice that focused primarily on language rather than business. Cultural content was delineated as cultural notes, short readings on cultural topics, menus, culturally specific photographs, advertisements and cartoons.

Sources of Cultural Content

In the eight texts, sources of cultural content include short readings on a specific cultural topic, cultural notes, photographs, advertisements, cartoons, greeting cards, stamps, and maps. None of the texts employ any of the cultural

"teachniques" that have been in use since the seventies such as culture capsules, culture assimilators, mini-dramas, cultoons (Morain, 1983; Omaggio, 1986) Indeed the majority of authentic materials such as business correspondence, documents, and advertisements that are presented in the texts are generic and contain little or no cultural information.

With respect to the readings, the first twelve chapters of the Gómez-Quintero & Pérez text treat generic buisness topics such as the modern office, organization of a firm, telecommunications, banking, insurance and real estate; only the last two chapters focus on economic aspects of specific Hispanic countries and regions. Most of the readings in the Curry et al book cover generic business topics and carry minimal reference to Spanish speaking countries. The exceptions are the readings following chapters four and eight concerning economic difficulties in Latin America and foreign investment, and a reading in chapter nine on foreign investment. In one third of the chapters in Lebredo & Fortuny-Amat, no mention of Spain or Latin America appears in the generic readings on business administration, advertising, personnel and marketing. In half of the chapters in the Sallese & Griffin book, the short readings contain no reference to Hispanic countries or culture. In a generic way they treat the office, insurance, real estate, wholesale and retail, factory, consumer, and mail, transportation and communications.

Black and white photographs effectively convey cultural information in the Curry et al, Gomez-Quintero & Perez, and

Tcachuk texts. Virtually no photographs other than a few in advertisements appear in the two Jarvis & Lebredo texts, the Lebredo & Fortuny-Amat, and the Sallese & Griffin. In Valdivieso and Valdivieso, the photographs that precede every chapter are generic and typically portray office scenes. Several texts (Curry et al, Sallese & Griffin, Tcachuk, Valdivieso & Valdivieso) include cartoons which carry cultural information.

Sources of cultural information in the Tcachuk text consist of the short readings "formas de pensar y vivir", the opening reading and dialog which contain cultural information in context, photos (of two men engaged in a warm "abrazo", downtown Buenos Aires, the Calle Florida, a colonial style mansion, immigrants recently arrived in Argentina), cartoons (on the Argentine economy), advertisement (Aerolíneas Argentinas "a very European South American airline), and a menu from an Argentine restaurant. As can be seen above, sources of cultural information are predominantly Argentine. Many of the authentic documents which are presented such as memos, business letters and cables are generic.

Sources for the cultural content of the Valdiviesos' text include brief cultural notes that present business culture information related to correspondence and cartoons. Most of the authentic business documents such as letters, invoices, checks, advertisements, and receipts are generic.

In the Lebredo & Fortuny-Amat text, the cultural information is contained in the short readings on specific business and economic topics relating to a Hispanic country or the Latin

American region. The so-called cultural notes do not address cultural topics; rather they provide explanations of business terminology such as "tercer mundo", "mena" and "ganga".

Cultural Topics and Activities

The Tcachuk text, though limited, covered the widest range of cultural topics, mostly related to patterns of everyday living although with some treatment of economic culture. At times the treatment of cultural issues approached the touristic with the emphasis on geography, dining out, and architectural styles in Buenos Aires. In the culturally oriented section in each chapter on "formas de pensar y vivir", Tcachuk covers these topics: non-verbal communication (the handshake, the 'abrazo', the kiss), the Argentine character, keeping time in Hispanic countries, bureaucracy in action, immigration and customs, forms of address, last names, stores, the tearoom and cafe, music, social clubs, punctuality, the familty midday meal, and the interplay of humanities and pragmatics. Within the context of the opening readings and dialogs, she introduces information on the Argentine bureaucracy, visa requirements, Ezeiza, traffic in Buenos Aires, condominiums in the city, having coffee, lunch, late night habits in Buenos Aires, and museums and zones of the city.

Following the "formas de pensar y vivir" section is oral practice, which consists of questions that ask the student to relate personal experience, opinion, and background knowledge to the newly presented cultural information. For example, following the short reading on the "abrazo, beso y apretón de manos", the

questions ask how demonstrative is the family of the student; the opinion of the student toward this behavior, and the type of impression that these expressions of emotion creates on the student. The suggestions for discussion urge the student to think about cross-cultural concepts. Even more of these activities would strengthen the cultural content of the text.

In the Valdiviesos' text, cultural topics relate to business correspondence. Through brief "notas de interés profesional" the authors discuss national and local laws governing the holding of business documents, reasons for names of Latin banks, the lack of use of red ink, comparison of the use of cardinal and ordinal numbers in the U.S. and Hispanic countries, salutations and closings of letters, absence of junk mail in Latin America, and the metric system. The abundance of authentic business documents, although generic, serve the purpose of showing how the forms look in Spanish. The authors succeed in integrating language and business correspondence and related cultural considerations in their text through the highlighting of similarities and differences. Patterns of everyday living culture are not included. The activities of the text in the sections "El negocio está en sus manos! require the students to apply the business, language and cultural information covered in the text with: translation, paraphrase activity, writing of business letters and sales promotions, filling out forms, cloze exercise, preparing a resume, and how to obtain a birth certificate. In one activity from the section "demuestre su competencia profesional", the students must design a letter head

for a firm in Ecuador.

In addition, activities in the "proyectos" section of the four review chapters involve the student in cross-cultural research to actively seek information from the community and the library concerning business and correspondence topics. Some of these projects include: compare and contrast a specific business law of the U.S. and a Hispanic country where you would like to work and make an oral report to the class; obtain an actual business letter from a firm, place it on a projector and compare it to a business letter in Spanish; write a letter requesting a copy of a magazine published in a Hispanic country; from the international department of a local bank, get examples of official documents from Hispanic countries for import and export. These are among the best activities we found in the texts reviewed for development of cross-cultural understanding through active involvement of the student.

With respect to business and economic culture, Lebredo & Fortuny-Amat present information through readings on the economy of Spain, Latin America, Mexico, banking in Latin America, petroleum, mining, manufacturing, transportation systems, the Hispanic consumer, coffee, sugar, bananas, foreign investment in Mexico, and legal aspects of doing business in Hispanic countries. In a number of chapters, students are asked to prepare reports on topics that are briefly discussed in the readings such as: agriculture in Spain, coffee production in Columbia, steel in Venezuela, the legal aspects of doing work in the United States or Hispanic countries. One activity requires

that students hold a debate on the pros and cons of multinational enterprises in Latin America.

In Sallese & Griffin, topics of the cultural notes written in English include pronunciation in Spanish, "tú" and "usted", propriety, currency, woman's role, names, holidays in Puerto Rico, and sherry among others.

In summary, little emphasis is placed on patterns of daily living culture or economic culture and fewer activities focus on cultural knowledge or understanding. The treatment of cultural topics and themes appears arbitrary and without visible order or guidelines; it indicates the lack of consensus about which aspects of culture should be taught in the business Spanish class. The chief pedagogical devices used to present cultural information are the cultural note and short reading on an aspect of culture (Lebredo & Fortuny- Amat; Sallese & Griffith; Tcachuk; Valdivieso & Valdivieso). With the exception of the Valdivieso and Tcachuk texts, problem-solving activities related to cultural content or the active exploration of cultural differences and similarities are missing in these texts.

Conclusions

Given the above analysis, we conclude that the cultural content of the eight business Spanish texts is extremely limited to certain patterns of everyday life (Tcachuk), some business correspondence culture (Valdivieso & Valdivieso), aspects of economic culture (Lebredo & Fortuny-Amat and minimal treatment in the other texts. In order to remedy this situation,

we make the following recommendations for business Spanish professors and text writers: 1) expand the treatment of cultural topics, including both patterns of everyday living and economic culture through integration with language and business content; 2) consult business Spanish students about their interests in culture, and include the topics of greatest interest to the students in the class and future texts; 3) make extensive use of authentic materials such as television, radio, newspapers and magazines which are inherently rich in culture; 4) incoporate learning activities that promote cross-cultural understanding and critical thinking such as community-based research projects; 5) encourage students to interact with native speakers; 6) use a variety of teaching techniques available for the presentation of culture such as those described by Morain (1983) and Omaggio (1986). Our findings raise other questions about how business Spanish teachers are coping with the lack of cultural content in the texts. To what extent are they using supplemental materials? What is the impact on the business Spanish student's second language acquisition and development of cultural knowledge and understanding? Awareness of the lack of cultural content in business Spanish texts is the first step to a reversal of the present situation. Only when culture becomes an integral part of classroom instruction in the business language AND traditional language classroom will our students have a chance to develop the cross-cultural and linguistic understanding they need to become competent speakers of Spanish.

TABLE 1

Business, Linguistic, and Cultural Content of Business Spanish Texts

Text by Author	Unit Three # of Pages Devoted to Business Content	Linguistic Content	Cultural Content	Total # of Pages
Beginning Level:				
Spanish for Business and Finance	1	8	0	9
Spanish for Business and Economics	3	6	0	9
Intermediate:				
Carreras: Negocios	5	10	1	16
Spanish for Business and Economics: Reader and Workbook	5	7	1	13
Español práctico para negocios	5	11	2	18
Intermediate/Advanced:				
Al día en los negocios: Hablemos	4	5	0	9
Advanced:				
En el mundo de los negocios	10	8	3	21
Negocios y comunicaciones	6	3	4	13

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